

National Infant Immunization Week Questions and Answers

1. What is NIIW?

National Infant Immunization Week, April 13-19, 2003, is an annual observance that highlights the importance of timely immunization. It is a time to focus greater attention on our achievements and on the work we do throughout the year to raise coverage levels. We celebrate with our partners the accomplishments that would not have occurred without successful collaboration. We also take the time to revitalize joint efforts to remind parents, caregivers, health care providers, and others of the need to take appropriate steps to protect children against 11 vaccine-preventable diseases and give them a healthy start to life. Our main goals are to:

- Increase infant immunization rates in the community.
- Make parents, caregivers and health care providers aware of the need to protect their children from birth against 11 vaccine-preventable diseases.
- Encourage better communication between parents and caregivers and their health care provider about a child's vaccination needs.
- Inform parents and caregivers of the need to check their children's immunization records and follow through on childhood immunization recommendations by making and keeping the needed appointments.
- Increase parents and caregiver's awareness of and access to resources such as toll-free 800 numbers, to help them locate local facilities offering free or low-cost immunizations for their children if they do not have insurance or a health care provider.

Our key messages are:

- Immunizations are one of the most important ways parents can protect their children against serious diseases.
- Each day 11,000 babies are born who will need to be immunized against eleven diseases before age two.
- We can now prevent more diseases than ever before. Because we can prevent more diseases, parents are often not aware of what it takes to fully immunize a child.
- Infants and young children are particularly vulnerable to infectious diseases; that is why it is critical that they are protected through immunization.
- Parents and caregivers need to take responsibility for their child's vaccinations. They are encouraged to become informed consumers and keep a record of each immunization visit.
- Immunization protects families and communities. Children who are not immunized increase the chance that others will get the disease.
- Immunizations are extremely safe thanks to advancements in medical research and ongoing review by doctors, researchers, and public health officials.

- Children are far more likely to be harmed by serious infectious diseases than by immunization.

2. What are some of the activities have occurred across the country during NIIW?

Each year, more than 500 activities are planned in communities across the country to celebrate NIIW and highlight the positive impact immunization makes on the lives of infants and children and focus attention to national, state, and community immunization achievements. Communities both large and small, have participated in NIIW and play a vital role in protecting children from vaccine-preventable diseases. Some examples of past NIIW events include award dinners, health fairs, mock pox outbreaks, extended clinic hours, grand rounds for providers, and neighborhood canvassing. Some examples of NIIW events include:

NIIW 2002 – Albuquerque, New Mexico

During NIIW 2002 Albuquerque, New Mexico launched a new state wide immunization campaign urging parents and physicians to “Make Every Visit Count” by ensuring New Mexico’s children under the age of 2 are fully immunized. The campaign included public service announcements, billboards, newspaper ads and a number of other marketing tools designed to educate the public about the importance of childhood immunization.

Providers were a key target of this campaign and numerous events were planned during NIIW to reach health care professionals including a series of Grand Rounds at the UNM School of Nursing, UNM School of Medicine, Albuquerque Area Indian Health Service Hospital and Lovelace Medical Center. A state-wide provider education dinner honoring New Mexico physicians who are making sure their young patients are vaccinated was also held. Presenters at these provider focused events included Dr. Walter Orenstein, Assistant Surgeon General and the Director of the National Immunization Program at CDC, Dr. Alex Valdez New Mexico’s State Health Secretary, and Dr. Frederick Pintz, Chief Medical Officer at the New Mexico Department of Health. Speakers focused on the success of immunization, benefits vs. risk of vaccines, safety, shortages, vaccination barriers unique to rural areas and promoted the new statewide immunization registry.

A news conference was held at the Hispanic Cultural Center and included 3, 4, and 5 year old dancers from Isleta Head Start Program and other children from community day care centers. Dr. Valdez discussed plans to increase immunizations for New Mexico children and Dr. Walt Orenstein joined Dr. Valdez to premiere the national Spanish-language media campaign “The Promise.” The campaign consisted of a full color poster, informational booklet on vaccines, Audio News Release (ANR), a television PSA and a radio PSA. The television PSA was distributed to more than 100 Spanish-language TV stations nationwide as well as to Telemundo and Univision. The posters and booklets were distributed to community centers, community leaders, churches, schools, health care facilities and non-traditional sites.

NIIW 2001 – Newark, NJ

In 2001, NIIW was held in Newark, New Jersey. The week began with a kick-off breakfast at the Newark Club attended by two hundred immunization leaders from government, healthcare, and private industry. Speakers included Sen. Robert Torricelli, Congressman Donald Payne, Dr. Jules Titelbaum, Children's Hospital of New Jersey, Newark Beth Israel Medical Center, Christine Grant, New Jersey State commissioner of Health, Dr. Louis Cooper, vice president, American Academy of Pediatrics, Catherine Cuomo-Cicere, commissioner of the Newark Department of Health and Human Services and Dr. Jose Cordero, deputy director, NIP, CDC. The event was covered by local New Jersey TV stations, as well as local radio stations and newspapers, including the *Newark Star-Ledger*, the state's largest paper.

Following the breakfast, Drs. Cooper and Cordero, Congressman Payne and Commissioner Grant attended the New Jersey Pediatric Leadership Coalition. The coalition is a networking group of 30 to 40 key New Jersey pediatricians and family physicians whose primary goal is to influence health, political and managed care policies. Dr. Bob Morgan of the New Jersey Health Department moderated a lively discussion concerning pediatric practice issues. Dr. Cordero gave a brief overview of the new National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities.

The day concluded with the Spanish-language NIIW media launch of the 2001 Hispanic Public Service Campaign. The event was held at the Courtyard Plaza in a predominately Hispanic community, and was sponsored by FOCUS and La Case De Don Pedro, two Newark Hispanic community centers. The event was emceed by Jorge Ramos, Co-anchor Norciero 47, Telemundo Spanish-language television. Speakers included Congressman Robert Menendez, Dr. Cordero, Frank Morales, chairman of FOCUS, and Dr. Debbie Salazar-Lopez, medical director, FOCUS.

Following the formal ceremony, there was a health fair with information booths, a band, a raffle and clowns. The event was well covered by the Hispanic media, including Telemundo, Univision and local Spanish-language radio.

NIIW 2000 – Houston, TX

In 2000, the NIIW kickoff was held in Houston, Texas. On Friday, the day before the official kickoff in Houston, Dr. Jose Cordero spoke at a San Antonio NIIW Kickoff and Appreciation Breakfast. Dr. Cordero was once again the featured speaker that afternoon during the rollout of the Spanish-language PSA campaign. Additional speakers included the local state representative and senator, City of Houston Fire Chief, and the Houston Commissioner of Health. The PSA rollout took place at a local firehouse located in a Hispanic neighborhood. A firehouse was chosen because of the theme of the PSA, *Be a Hero*, featuring a fire fighter. The presentation was followed by a street festival featuring bands, local celebrities, and refreshments. A local Hispanic radio station provided sponsorship and did a local remote from the site.

A rally kicked-off NIIW in a downtown park and was sponsored by Hope for Kids. About 400 volunteers attended and, following the event, returned to their local

neighborhood to canvass with immunization messages. Hope for Kids rallies have been held for several years in local Houston neighborhoods and have been tremendously successful. However, this was the first year that it was held in a centralized location. In attendance was Representative Gene Green who announced legislation he is sponsoring to increase VFC funding. The day concluded with an awards dinner where the local coalition recognized leaders in Houston's immunization efforts.

NIIW 1999 – Chicago, Illinois

In 1999, the NIIW kickoff was held in Chicago, Illinois. The day began with a rally sponsored by Hope for Kids of approximately 3000 volunteers held in Union Park. Following the rally, community volunteers went door to door to remind parents and caregivers of the importance of immunizations. Following the Union Park event there were three smaller rallies in Lake, DuPage, and Cook counties where CDC/NIP officials spoke. There were 300 - 600 volunteers at each of these rallies. These three communities have strong local identities and local media. The events provided these communities with a sense of being part of a major event and increased local community media coverage. Following the local kickoffs the volunteers went door to door to promote immunization awareness and provide information on locations for immunizations. During the day, volunteers visited homes of more than 100,000 children, including 14,000 children in families without health insurance. The day concluded with an evening awards/recognition ceremony at the Navy Pier which was attended by approximately 600.

3. How important are partnerships in promoting the importance of childhood immunizations?

Partnerships with public and private groups have enhanced traditional public health immunization efforts. They have resulted in:

Revitalization of existing and development of new statewide and local coalitions to promote parent awareness about the value of vaccinating their children, to encourage health care providers to use every opportunity to vaccinate children in their care, and to highlight the vaccination needs of infants and children during NIIW.

Implementation of innovative strategies to remind parents when shots are due and recall them when shot appointments are missed (e.g., telephone, letter contact), reach children who do not have a regular source of medical care and refer them to a health care provider (e.g., door-to-door visits with parents), and use pre-existing contacts with parents to check their children's immunization status (e.g., getting kids immunized through contacts with Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) programs).

Improvement of community planning and development for immunization programs.

Expansion of outreach campaigns and public service announcements to call attention to the need to properly immunize children.

Particular emphasis has been placed on enhancing partnerships between public and private health care providers. Such partnerships have been strengthened largely due to the inception of the Vaccines for Children (VFC) program which became operational across the Nation October 1, 1994. This program established, for the first time, a mechanism to provide public vaccine to private providers to serve eligible children. Activities related to implementing this program were instrumental in raising awareness of immunization issues (e.g., missed opportunities, new vaccine recommendations, contraindications, new strategies to raise immunization coverage) among providers, increased communication between public and private providers, and resulted in more opportunities to provide technical assistance regarding immunization.

4. What promotional campaigns are available to highlight the importance of childhood immunizations?

In an effort to raise immunization rates among Hispanics, the CDC will introduce a national Spanish-language media campaign that will be launched in Los Angeles during NIIW 2003. The Spanish-language media campaign will consist of a 30-second Spanish-language public service announcement, a Spanish-language immunization education booklet, and a 30 second English-language announcement all based on the theme "*The Promise*." The Spanish-language PSA will be distributed to 120 Spanish-language television stations in the top 50 Hispanic media markets as well as to Telemundo and Univision. The English-language PSA will be distributed to state and local health departments.

5. Why is there a separate English-language PSA targeted to Hispanics?

Under-immunization is a problem that particularly affects the Hispanic Community. When targeting U. S. Latinos with health messages in English, language alone is not the most effective means of communications. Health messages need to reflect:

- a thorough understanding of culture and traditions,
- the emotional significance and pride of the Hispanic culture, and
- ethnic identification through experience, expression, reaction and body movement.

Given this fact, it is imperative that culturally relevant advertising be created for English speaking or English preferred Hispanics to motivate the target audiences to have their children vaccinated before age two.

6. Why is childhood immunization an important issue?

Immunization is one of the most effective ways of protecting against disease. The level of most vaccine-preventable diseases has been reduced by more than 99 percent since the introduction of vaccines. Reported cases of many vaccine-preventable diseases are at, or near, all-time low levels. Before widespread immunization in the United States,

infectious diseases killed or disabled thousands of children each year. Tens of thousands of cases of paralytic polio and nearly 400,000 measles cases were reported annually.

Over ten years ago a measles epidemic swept across the nation leading to 55,000 cases of measles, 11,000 hospitalizations, and more than 120 deaths. We implemented improvements in services, increased access, and identified innovative ways to overcome many barriers to immunization. As a result we have made tremendous progress in protecting our children's health. Today more children than ever before are immunized against serious diseases.

However, we cannot rest upon our accomplishments. In fact, our work has just begun. More than 900,000 children are still not adequately immunized and each day in the US 11,000 more children are born that we must protect.

7. The U.S. has high immunization coverage rates for 2-year olds and virtually no cases of vaccine-preventable diseases. Does this mean that we have reached a point where we can reduce the attention given to childhood immunization programs? Why not focus on other child health problems?

While it is true that disease levels are low and immunization rates are high, much remains to be done to assure the protection of our Nation's children into the next century. Over 900,000 two year-olds are not fully protected against vaccine-preventable diseases, and every day approximately 11,000 children are born who need the full series of vaccines. Much of what remains to be done involves fully implementing proven strategies to maintain, and increase coverage rates. We need to continue to work until such proven strategies are effectively in place.